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ABSTRACT

Fourteen examples of "literacy events" in the reading development of one preschool-age boy are described by the boy's mother, a parent-researcher who conducted a case study of her son's interaction with his literate home environment. Field notes were kept in a household diary, and audiotapes were made of the child's storytelling and retelling, of his mother's reading aloud to him, and of the verbal communication between mother and son during morning car rides to nursery school. These records served as a basis for analyzing how reading-related behaviors underscore early literacy. In addition, artifacts were collected, such as samples of the child's writing, typing, drawing, magnetic letter creations, and dictated stories. Data were subclassified under three general categories of behavior: (1) "reading-wise" behaviors, including book handling and pretend reading; (2) "book reading" behaviors, consisting of activities closely related to the reading ritual; and (3) "early reading/print" behaviors, subsuming the child's experiences with reading print and words. Examples from all three general categories are discussed in terms of their relevance to several issues in the area of reading development. Concluding remarks point out the significance of the larger case study, on which this article is based, for understanding the development of literacy. (RH)

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Literacy and Child Rearing

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The need to focus attention in reading research on the complex network of reading related behaviors parallels the movement of linguistic research in the past decade to include para-linguistic phenomena (e.g. proxemics and kinesics) in the study of communication (Birdwhistle, 1970; Goffman, 1963). Reading is surrounded by a network of related behaviors and contextual arrangements that merit attention in their own right. Literacy, then, includes the entire matrix of Reading and Writing in its social milieu. By gaining a fuller understanding of this dynamic interaction, the reading process may be better understood. Smith (forthcoming) suggests that literacy be viewed in its social context as well as cognitively. As a parent researcher, I recorded the network of interrelated, intertwined literacy events which contextualized my son's reading development. My intent was to holistically describe David's development of these behaviors from ages 2:6 to 4:6. This report summarizes part of the actual case study (1982).

Reading Aloud

Researchers, parents and teachers alike extol the benefits of reading aloud to children and the value of fostering a literate home environment[1] in the preschool years. As early as Huey (1908), the literature has been interspersed with recommendations to read aloud to children. Chomsky (1972) reports that access to books in the preschool years is associated with better school achievement. Despite this advocacy, there is a paucity of descriptive research focused on the developmental changes in children's interaction with books and their reading related behaviors.

In keeping with my personal philosophy of education and literacy, it was important for me to read to my children and to help them enjoy language and literature. In this context, I created a home environment which respected David's interests and initiative and gave positive feedback to his literacy endeavors which included reading aloud to him.

I began collecting data on this process January 22, 1979, when David was 2½ years old, in the household diary which I kept in the kitchen. Interwoven with household details is a description of David's interaction with his literate home environment. A complete record of the books that were read to David was also kept in the diary. Recorded were his verbal and non-verbal interactions before, during and after reading aloud; his references to books -- either genre,

characters, or vocabulary; his reading wise behaviors; his repetition of book language; his sentence lifting; his recitation; his spontaneous and other directed dramatization of books; his elicited and spontaneous retelling of stories; his comments revealing metalinguistic awareness and his interaction with and manipulation of print and his early reading behaviors.

In addition to diary fieldnotes, audio tapes of David's storytelling and retelling, of my reading aloud to him, and of the verbal communication between us during the morning car rides to nursery school were collected. These records of David's interactions with his literate home environment served as a basis for analyzing how reading related behaviors underscore early literacy. I also collected artifacts such as samples of David's writing, typing, drawing, magnetic letter creations, and dictated stories.

I chose to classify data into three categories of behaviors: grouping book handling and pretend reading designated as "Reading-wise" behaviors; activities closely related to the reading ritual entitled "Book reading" behaviors and "Early reading-Print" behaviors of the child's experiences with reading print and words. Subcategories were designated within each of the three categories in order to further analyze the data.

Some examples of Reading-wise research questions include: How does the child hold a book for reading? What evidence is there that the child turns pages and looks at

and points to print? What evidence is there that the child pretends to read? What evidence is there of "book language" as the child "pretend reads"? What evidence does the researcher have that the child has the knowledge that print tracks sound? What evidence is there of a growing attachment to books? and so on.

The brevity of this article allows me to offer only a few examples of reading registers which is only one of the strands within the Reading-wise subcategory of pretend reading. These point to David's flexible use of his voice and his ability to select the appropriate register from the context of the print.

Example 1

David sat at the breakfast table with the entire family. He proceeded to sing the alphabet song in the traditional melody while pointing to the letters of the alphabet which were printed on his personal juvenile-style placemat. He sang, "ABCDEFG...HIJKLMNOP...QRSTUV..W.X.Y and Z."

8/24/79; 3:1 (age)

This example illustrates David's ability to recognize the print in its "print setting" (Harste and Carey, 1979). As Harste and Carey comment, this understanding of alternate print settings is a growing understanding of our written language. By using different reading registers for different print settings, David demonstrated a "functional expectation for written language" (Harste, Burke, and Woodward, 1979).

Harste, et al found a similar ability in the children in their study.

Example 2

David took out a brochure from Linvilla Orchards. First he held it upside-down, and then he turned it around and "read" in a staccato, commanding voice,

"It says, 'Don't take hayrides', see Daddy?"

Jerry said, "No, it says, 'David is a good boy'."

David answered, "No, you're only kidding Daddy. It's about Linvilla Orchards."

10/21/79; 3:3 (age)

Example 3

David found one of Jerry's legal papers, in the familiar light blue cover sheet, on the desk where he was playing. He held the paper upright in front of him and dogmatically "read",

"The law says to stop on red."

10/7/80; 4:3 (age)

David brought his own background of information to the print setting. He was familiar with his father's legal papers and also knew that lawyers do something with laws. David demonstrated an active responsiveness to the content and context of the print in a way in which one can see the use of his comprehension skills long before he learned to decode. He knew the theme or function of print by its form, layout and setting. Like Rachael Scollon (Scollon and Scollon, 1979), David had learned a definite oral reading prosody that was different from his conversational one.

Example 4

I read the book David and the Giant and David emphatically said the last line,

"David will be king!"

8/5/80; 4:1 (age)

Example 5

David was sitting on the bed waiting for me to read to him. He pulled out some mail brochures from his play suitcase and pretended to read them in the lilting, fluid style of letter writing. He "read",

"Dear Alisa,

I love you. You are special.

Love,

David Hoffman"

8/23/79; 3:1 (age)

By using his voice appropriately, he noted the uniqueness of Hebrew print, musical notation, brochures, legal briefs, letters, signs and fiction books. Consider the following excerpts from the data.

Example 6

David complained that he couldn't fall asleep. In order to help himself fall asleep, he left the light on and sat in bed and "read" "De Tar Baby" aloud to himself. I was in the next room and heard the entire story said in dialect. He began with....

"One day, Brer Fox and Brer Bear wuz sittin' round in de woods, talkin' about de way Brer Rabbit wuz always cuttin' up capers an actin' so fresh."

4/1/79; 2:9 (age)

Example 7

When David unrolled his miniature Torah scroll, he started to chant the story of Abraham in English. His key and mode (Hymes, 1972) were in the nasal minor key of the traditional Hebrew Torah chant (trope). He chanted,

> "Once, a long time ago, Abraham and Isaac went to the desert."

Then he looked at me with a smile and put the Torah away for something else.

9/30/80; 4:2 (age)

In these examples we see David's use of different reading registers in response to various kinds of print settings. A key concept here is that David learned to address the context of the print. In so doing, he was able to modify his reading according to its genre and for his audience. David knew that the members of his family were familiar with his culture--specific knowledge and, therefore, would be appreciative of the modification of his "reading" voice.

Piaget (1926) states that the preschool child is egocentric and unable to take into account the perspectives of others. He states that the child cannot adjust his message to the listener. Vygotsky (1962) writes that children learn to use language appropriately in social settings while acquiring syntactic competence. This ongoing discussion of sociocentric development applied to David's use of different registers and his modification of his "reading" according to the print setting as well as the function and genre of print as evidenced by his use of appropriate reading registers. Unlike Piaget's description of a

preschooler, it would seem that David evolved as a socio-centric child.

Book reading, the second major category in the study, was divided into three subcategories.

- Setting and selection
- Vocabulary
- Interaction of text ↔ life

I attempted to answer such research questions as: What is the setting for book reading? What are the parent-child interactions during the book reading sessions? What is the genre of the child's books? How does the child use book language in daily speech? What comparisons of words or word play is evident from books? and so on.

Some representative examples of David's interaction of text↔ life can be seen in the following examples where he easily traveled back and forth from books to life. He became so familiar with the book contents that he was able to integrate, synthesize and utilize the contents as if they were his own. However, he remembered his sources and often cited them.

In order to live the book characters, book language and setting, David role played and dramatized from the texts. At times he merely dressed as a book character and went about his daily business. On other occasions he pretended to be a book character and brought book language and genre into his play. At still other times, he formally dramatized a story

by giving out roles, directing and using props. David actively lived the stories in his books throughout the study. I recorded this area of role play and dramatization with the same persistence during the entire study. Witness the following examples which were taken over time.

Example 8

David was playing with his loaded wagon. I asked, "Do you think you can pull that heavy load all the way to the other room?" David answered,

> "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can, I think I can. I think I can...."

until he got into the other room. Then he shouted back,

> "I thought I could, I thought I could, I thought I could, I thought I could."

1/23/79; 2:6 (age)

from The Little Engine That Could

Example 9

David and I were alone and I made him instant hot oatmeal for breakfast. He said,

> "This is too hot. Let's leave it here, dear, and go for a walk in the woods."

2/12/79; 2:7 (age)

from The Three Bears

In the following example, David announces who he is portraying and then continues with his role play.

Example 10

During dinner, David butted his head into his father's chest. It hurt Jerry and he said, "Hey, that hurts!" David answered,

> "I'm Brer Rabbit and you're the tar baby and that's what Brer Rabbit does to the tar baby!"

8/1/79; 3:1 (age)

from "The Tar Baby"

While the previous examples are representative of David's role play of book characters and mini-dramatizations of story excerpts, the following examples represent David's dramatization, direction and production of full stories.

Example 11

D. = David
J. = Jerry, Father

D. - Once upon a time (pause) there was three Billy Goats Gruff. Gruff. They were going up to the hillside to get more grass and they had to cross a bridge. And under the bridge was a (louder) great, big, ugly, mean, bad troll. (pause) And the first (whispering) Billy Goat, a little baby Billy Goat went over to the hillside.

J. - (Gruffly) Who's that walking over my bridge?

D. - (Squeaking) The Little Billy Goat Gruff.

J. - (Gruffly) Stop right there! I'm going to eat you up.

D. - (Squeaking) No. Wait for my bigger brother!

J. - Okay. Be off with you.

D. - (Squeaking) Thank you! Trip, trap! (louder) Trip, trap!

J. - (Gruffly) Who is that walking over my bridge?. . . . .

7/79; 3:0 (age) Tape 1. Page 5

In the above role play and dramatization examples we can see how David operationalized the books that were read to him. He took the language and content of the books in making literature a part of his life.

Early reading-Print, the third category, was divided into three subcategories:

- Child questions print settings
- Child evidences development
- Child manipulates print

Within these areas, I attempted to answer such research questions as What questions does the child ask about print in books? What questions does the child ask about print in his environment? What evidence does the child show of grapheme-phoneme correspondence? What evidence is there of a growing sight vocabulary? What evidence is there that the child manipulates print? What evidence is there of a progression in printing? and so on.

Some examples from "Child questions print settings" reveal David's questions about print in books. These examples answer the research question, What questions does the child ask about print in books? These questions were asked during the book reading sessions themselves.

Example 12

I started to read the alphabet book A Apple Pie. David asked,

"Which letter begins with me?"

We turned the pages and found the "D" and he smiled. Then he turned the pages and found the "H" and said,

"Hoffman begins with H".

10/17/79; 3:3 (age)

For David, "D" and "H" are his letters; a similar discussion can be seen in Clay (1975, p. 46).

Example 13

I started to read Do Baby Bears Sit in Chairs? when David asked,

"Where is 'No oh No'?"

I pointed to the print and then he read while pointing with his right index finger, "No oh No". He read this repeatedly six times. After he read the words, he did

not want to go on to the next page right away. He indicated this by holding down the pages with both hands and looking at the print. He turned the page only when he was ready.

3/7/80; 3:8 (age)

Example 14

I began to read Curious George Learns the Alphabet by reading the cover aloud. David asked,

"Where does it say /k/ /k/ /k/ Curious George?"

I showed him by pointing to the print and said,

"This says Curious George Learns the Alaphabet",

pointing to the words as I read them. Then David asked,

"Well, what does H. A. say?"

I answered, "H. A. are the first two letters of the author's name, H. A. Rey." David responded,

"Okay -- let's read."

When I finished the book, David sang the alphabet song.

4/28/80; 3:9 (age)

David's questions about print in the intimacy of the book reading dyad reveal his early grappling with the concept of print. In example 12, he begins with the most personal level when he asks, "Which letter begins with me?" "D" and "H" are his personal letters at this stage. In the next example (13), he tries to locate three words that he remembers from previous readings. In example 14, David works on the title of a Curious George book and its author.

This shared time required mutual concentration, respect and patience. David could not be rushed in his attempts and serious beginnings. These trials and frustrations can be likened to the sheer time and work discussed by Bissex of her

son's learning to read (1979). According to Bissex, "Paul learned to read and write earlier than some, not because these tasks were easy for him but because they were possible and because he committed himself to the great effort of learning them." (p. 164)

Because my presentation here and the examples I cited are only a small portion of the entire study, the conclusions that I will note may not seem totally supported. But, as hinted at, the results of the larger study show that David's development of literacy skills did not follow a neat sequential ladder of one skill followed by a more complex skill and so on. Rather, his behaviors spiraled - constantly developing and expanding through recursive issues of literacy. In addition, David freely moved on to new areas of interest as he tired of others. He had his own timetable for learning which I encouraged to be largely self-initiated, self-paced, self-structured, and frequently self-terminated. David was an active and full participant in his learning from the first. When he lost interest in a subject, it was dropped and new interests were pursued with the same freedom. I was committed to allowing David to be self-paced. I didn't even encourage him to finish a book he chose not to. My personal home style is different from learning styles more typical of schools where children are required to finish work. Cazden (1979) discusses a similar contrast in home and school learning games where she states,

> "...important differences between...home and school events as well as similarities. Very different from the classroom is the change in these home language games as the child develops... The adult so structures the game that the child's competence grows....When variations are no longer interesting, the game is abandoned and replaced." (p. 11)

David "worked on" his literacy in many areas and through many modalities. He dramatized stories that had been read to him and incorporated these stories into his play; he used magnetic letters to print the names of the signs from his outdoor "sign game"; he typed letters to give messages and so on. Literacy acquisition was a covert part of David's daily life program. Rather than being overtly taught, literacy became an integral part of David's daily growth, development and family relationship. A prominent theme which emerges is the spiraling repetition of behaviors. Literacy acquisition penetrated every phase of David's (and our family's) life and social interactions. It was not taught as an atomistic subject within other happenings. Rather, literacy was all encompassing.

One can draw his/her own recommendations from this article. On one hand, the use of direct observational techniques in a mother-child interaction might be heartening. Such methodology is relatively new in education and unique in this situation. On the other, a look at the content of the analysis would convey implications for practice by both parents or teachers.

In essence, my study points out gaps in other research and questions the prevailing tradition of how reading and literacy skills are acquired. It presents data to suggest an approach to reading in the home and school that is more naturalistic and holistic, one which respects the individual learner, his interests and style as well as the cultural milieu and its effects on learning.

It also provides data, which encourages the practice of establishing a rich literacy environment as a stimulus and matrix for becoming a literate in a literate environment, as contrasted with the prevalent practice of teaching from specialized texts, workbooks and other materials. This study supports integrated learning and is a positive example of the same. As such, it provides a fresh look at our approach to reading instruction.

Research Notes

1. Literate Home Environment is defined for this study as it is by Botel, M. and J. Seaver (1977) as:

> "A literate environment is one in which children frequently respond to literature. It provides models and experiences that represent advocacy of reading and language learning. Books and other reading, writing and manipulative materials are available; children are read to, guided in their explorations and talked with; children are encouraged to ask questions and are praised for their interest." (p. 3)

2. For a more detailed account of the manner of data collection and analysis, see Hoffman, 1982.

3. I am indebted to Dr. Lynne Putnam for the phrase and concept of "reading-wise" behaviors.

4. The data is presented in standard orthography rather than phonetic transcription, since my focus is not on David's pronunciation.

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